DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 118 156 IR 003 077

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TITLE Nontraditional Self-Studies in Accreditation.
INSTITUTION Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Atlanta, Ga. Commission on Colleges.
PUB DATE 23 Jan 76
NOTE 6p.; Paper Presented at the Continuing Library Education Network and Exchange Assembly (1st, Chicago, Illinois, January 23-24, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Accreditation (Institutions); Evaluation Methods; Institutional Research; Libraries; Library Standards; *University Libraries
IDENTIFIERS Self Study

ABSTRACT

A self-study of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools over a two-year period brought about a realization of the need for the development of nontraditional self-study for reaffirmation of accreditation. Such self-studies were conducted at Vanderbilt University, University of Houston, University of Miami, and the University of Louisville in 1975 and 1976. A new accreditation standard was adopted by the association that will help establish the library as the focal point of self-studies in the future. (DS)

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NONTRADITIONAL SELF-STUDIES IN ACCREDITATION

Over a two-year period covering 1972 and 1973 the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools engaged in a Self-Study of the total operations of the Association. A model of Self-Study for the Association was developed by a Steering Committee to include a comprehensive study of the Association as a whole and each of the four accrediting commissions which make up the Association.

The Self-Study of the Commission on Colleges produced many significant changes and improvements in the operational functions of the Commission. Among these is the option of an institution that has successfully completed at least one traditional Self-Study and is obviously in compliance with the Standards to develop a nontraditional Self-Study for reaffirmation of accreditaiton. Examples of situations which suggest the development of a nontraditional Self-Study are a major change in institutional governance and/or administration; a major revision of the educational program of the institution; relocation of the institution; need for a new management scheme for the institution; serious financial exigencies; addition of major units to the institution, both in additional campuses or additional programs on a single campus; and a major change in role and mission of the institution. The library and its role in the educational program of the institution and the community could well be the point of focus for a nontraditional Self-Study. When an institution wishes to exercise the option to develop a nontraditional Self-Study, the following procedures are followed:

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1. Notify the Executive Secretary of the Commission of the intent of the institution to develop a non-traditional self-study.
2. Prior to the beginning of the study, submit to the Executive Secretary for review and authorization a concept statement of the self-study form to be developed.

   The concept statement should include a clear expression of the purpose and objectives of the study and the reasons for deviating from the traditional format.
3. In the early stages of the development and/or implementation of the non-traditional self-study, advisory assistance of the Commission staff may be requested.
4. Prior to the official beginning of the self-study, the institution should submit a detailed prospectus of the program to the Executive Secretary of the Commission. The prospectus should include at least the following:
   a. identification of the non-traditional nature of the self-study;
   b. statement of purpose and objectives of the self-study;
   c. timetable for the self-study;
   d. organizational outline for the self-study;
   e. identification of the types of individuals to be utilized in the self-study organization;
   f. description of data collection methods to be utilized;
   g. description of evaluation methods and techniques to be utilized; and
   h. description of format, style, and organization of the final report.
5. Progress reports on the study should be submitted to the Executive Secretary at least semi-annually during the study. The reports should be brief and simple and should include identification of problems encountered, solutions to the problems, and identification of any change in the original design of the study.

   These reports will be of particular benefit to the Commission staff in designing a visiting committee appropriate to the non-traditional self-study.
6. Near the completion of the study the Commission staff will develop with the institution the dates for the committee visit and the composition of the committee.

A brief summary of the nontraditional self-studies completed or in process to date follows:

1. Vanderbilt University - completed in 1975.

The University has combined the efforts of the self-study with the on-going functions of budgeting and planning to develop a new "Plan for Planning." The Plan for Planning has eight distinguishing features:

(1) Planning and budgeting are coordinated;

(2) A five-year planning cycle;

(3) A new annual budget-making schedule;

(4) Profiles of each budget unit are developed and kept up-to-date;

(5) Horizontal studies are engaged in annually on some aspects of the institution to give cross-cutting examination and critique of University resources and programs;

(6) The "Plan for Planning" is designed to make the normal administrative process work at maximum efficiency;

(7) Annual program review and priority setting; and

(8) Special studies and reviews which may be needed as specific and unanticipated problems arise.

2. The University of Houston - to be completed in 1976.

The University is engaged in a self-study focused on the mission of the institution. The study evolves out of a situation in which a large metropolitan University finds itself becoming a complex system with several campuses. The study provides a rational framework within which the total University community can reassess its goals and objectives and formulate a new academic plan for immediate and long-range development.

The study is organized around nine university-wide task forces. The first six task forces are oriented to the development of goals, objectives, and plans of action in the following areas:

(1) Intellectual Development for the University and the Student,

(2) Career Development for the University and the Student,

(3) Personal and Social Development for the University and the Student,

(4) Discovery and Application of Knowledge for the University and Society,

(5) Life-long Learning for the University and Society,

(6) Public Service and Community Development for the University and Society,

The last three task forces are designed to assess the current status of all external and internal resources available to the university; thus, they are "resource-oriented" task forces:

(7) Assessment of Resources, Opportunities, and the Working Environment for the University and its Faculty, Staff. and Students,

(8) Assessment of Resources and Opportunities for the University and its Facilities and Finance, and

(9) Assessment of Resources and Opportunities for the University and its External Environment.

3. The University of Miami - to be completed in 1976.

The University of Miami is the Southern Association representative in a national project designed to develop an alternate self-study method which places the emphasis of the study on the measurement of outcomes of the educational process. The major components of this study include evaluation of educational objective, means for direct assessment of outcomes, evaluation of the educational experiences, resources, planning and decision-making mechanisms and their effectiveness, and how well the institution is interpreted to its various interest groups.

4. The University of Louisville - to be completed in 1976.

The focus of the self-study at the University is on academic planning. Task forces have been appointed to make indepth and cross-cutting studies in the areas of institutional

planning, governance, nontraditional education, continuing education and student services.

In our normal course of periodic review and up-dating of accreditation standards we have just completed a major revision of our Standard Six - Library. Though it may not appear to be as specific as some of you may wish, we feel very good about the new Standard which was formally adopted at the Annual Meeting of the Association last December. An emphasis of the new Standard is on the development of a broad-based, competent, professional library staff to help set and accomplish library goals and objectives compatible to institutional goals and objectives and which will encourage maximum utilization of the total library resources by the campus community and other related publics. This has obvious implication for library professionals in relation to knowledge and skills, continuing education, services and organizational needs.

Perhaps a nontraditional Self-Study with the library as the basic horizontal point of focus for appropriate and relevant vertical studies can be conducted by an institution in the near future. Such a study could more accurately and clearly define the role of the library in the total life of an institution and assist in answering some of the questions related to knowledge and skills for professionals, services needed, the kinds of continuing education programs to be developed for professionals, and give some indication of new organizational patterns which may be appropriate for a goal achievement.

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January 23, 1976
CLENE Assembly, Palmer House, Chicago